United States Department of Agriculture **Forest Service** **R3 Regional Office** **333 Broadway SE Albuquerque, NM 87102 FAX (505) 842-3800 V/TTY (505) 842-3292**

File Code: 3420 **Date:** October 22, 2002
Route To:

Subject: Proposed Camp May Road Dwarf Mistletoe Control Project

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest

On October 7, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Bill Armstrong (Espanola RD) to examine a potential treatment area located along the Camp May Road near Los Alamos. This area had originally been suggested by Bill as a replacement for the FY 2002 Borrego project area, which was destroyed by wildfire last spring. Following our site visit, Bill and George Alter (Santa Fe NF) have submitted a new proposal for treatment of this area, since these funds may no longer be available.

Proposed project area. The proposed treatment area is approximately 100 acres in size and extends for about one mile along the Camp May Road, the scenic highway to the Pararito Ski Area. Much of the surrounding forest was destroyed in the Cerro Grande wildfire of 2000. Most of the project area is visible from the highway, and the stands are frequently used for dispersed recreation.

The forest here is dense and multistoried, with a significant component of older, mature trees and overstocking in the sapling and pole components. Densities vary considerably, with over 600 trees per acre on the deeper soils, to around 200 trees per acre on the shallower, rockier soils. Species composition is roughly 80 percent ponderosa pine, 10 percent Douglas-fir, and five percent each of white fir and white pine.

Moderate dwarf mistletoe infection affects the ponderosa pine component, with an estimated 30 percent of the stems infected. At the time of our evaluation, a limited amount of bark beetle activity (western pine beetle and/or ips) was observed within the proposed project area. These bark beetles are at outbreak levels throughout much of the Los Alamos area, so the project area itself may well be under imminent threat.

During suppression efforts in the Cerro Grande wildfire, a backfire was run through this area, which may have helped protect it. The result of the backfire, and perhaps the wildfire itself, was a low intensity burn that consumed much of the existing ground fuels, while only occasionally reaching the crowns.

Proposed treatment. The proposed treatment is a low thinning, favoring the most vigorous dominant and codominant stems. Densities would be reduced to around 50 to 100 trees per acre, creating a much more open, park-like stand featuring large trees. Efforts will be made to maintain and enhance existing heterogeneity by leaving a clumpy, irregular stand structure.

The treatment would remove most of the dwarf mistletoe-infected trees, although some lightly infected trees would be retained where they are the best available leave trees. An objective within infested areas would be to leave the largest, most vigorous trees with the least amount of mistletoe. Non-host species—especially white pine and Douglas-fir—would also be favored within infection centers. The entire stand would be leave-tree-marked prior to treatment to improve overall results.

Following treatment, the area would be opened for public firewood gathering. Nearly all the project area is accessible, and it is anticipated that almost all of the larger (> 4" in diameter) would be removed from the site within a few weeks of the thinning. Following removal of the firewood, the area would be burned with a low intensity prescribed fire.

Benefits of project. The treatment would significantly improve stand growth and vigor, making the remaining trees less susceptible to bark beetle attack. The project would result in a more visually pleasing stand along this scenic corridor within the wildland-urban interface. With much of the surrounding forest destroyed in the Cerro Grande wildfire, the value of this area has increased considerably.

The treatment represents a sound approach for managing dwarf mistletoe. The mechanical treatment would remove the majority of the infected trees, while a prescribed fire could be expected to provide some additional reduction in infection levels. An irregular stand structure with small openings would tend to limit the spread of the parasite.

An additional benefit of the project would be the expected increase in grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Increased ground cover should significantly reduce soil erosion within these stands. The treatment would be implemented in the late summer or fall to reduce the chance for a build-up of *Ips* beetles. Please contact us if you have questions about this evaluation.

/s/ David A. Conklin (for)
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc: Leonard Lucero, Douglas L Parker, Debra Allen-Reid, William Armstrong, John Miera, George Alter